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Community-based Renewable Energy Systems to Improve Livelihood and the Quality of Life in Mindanao, Philippines

It is reflected in the Philippine Power Development Plan for 2005 to 2014 that there will be a power shortfall in the country if the government cannot put up more power generating plants within the next years. The PDP likewise emphasizes the insufficient allocation particularly for Mindanao which is expected to increase its consumption in the coming years, with the opening and re-opening of businesses there.

This means that people living in villages, especially in the southern grid of Mindanao, who have never experienced convenience in electricity may have to wait way longer.

However, the Yamog Renewable Energy Devt. Group, Inc. decided that two villages in Bukidnon and South Cotabato would only have to cooperate to stop the wait. In particular, Brgy. Dumalaguing in Impasug-ong, Bukidnon; Sitio Tablo in Brgy. Lemdalag, Lake Sebu, South Cotabato were the chosen beneficiaries of a micro-hydropower Project. Meanwhile the households of Sitio Amgu-o in Brgy. Landan, Polomolok, South Cotabato availed of water system using solar power to pump the water up to the community for potable water.

This micro-hydropower project, which runs March 2006- August 2008, has helped 375 households or 1,875 indigenous people in the aforementioned villages to enhance their own livelihood opportunities and income generation. With the apparent shift in energy use pattern from petrol-based kerosene to electricity, the people now enjoyed better lighting conditions.

While the children were able to extend their study hours up nighttime, the elderly could now mill corn in the nearby facilities anytime of the day without enduring long distances. The milling facility for corn, rice and coffee, which consumes 25KW of micro-hydro power, improved working conditions for the farmers. "The multipurpose milling allows our community members to have our products milled in the community. Before, we used to mill our corn and rice in the commercial mill, about eight kilometers away and we spend for the transportation and the milling cost. So we are very thankful" says Datu Mimi, a Higaonon and Chairman of the Dumalaguing Tribal Association.

Moreover the women loom weavers can now increase their outputs because of extended productivity. Hilda Ugay, a woman

expert on traditional loom weaving says that before electricity came to them, she could only weave during daytime. But now, she can weave and be more productive during night time.

And because they now have easy access to potable water (from the solar water pumping system), everyone was unburdened of daily fetching of water from the spring. The households can now utilize their own potable water for drinking, cooking and bathing from the installed pumping system right at the heart of the community through a network of eight tap stands. The women can now wash clothes more conveniently. And more importantly, sanitation and reduction of water borne-diseases especially affecting the children can now be expected to lessen.

On the Solar Water Pumping Project in Sitio Amguo, Landan, Polomolok, South Cotabato, "I am very happy that the water is here. Many thanks to God...that he sends Yamog as an instrument so that our long time dream of having water climb up here from the source became a reality. Thanks to the Green Empowerment, and the Global Village Energy Partnership International for their kind assistance," expressed an elderly Mrs. Sandag who is an active member of the local organization.

One of the key features of this cooperation micro-hydropower project by Yamog, the KANIB Foundation, Inc. and the LAYAG Health and Women Development is that sustainability is ensured by training the locals to become capable of running the facilities themselves as well as financially contributing to the operations and maintenance of the system to sustain the project. While it is the UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme and the GVEP International GAP Fund who are major guarantors of the project (estimated 70% of total funding), the LGUs (10%), the community counterpart (10%), and individual households (5-10%) also pay their part in the realization of the project.

Moreover, sustainability is ensured as the micro-hydropower facilities can be considered an income-generating project. All the identified beneficiary communities increase their capacity, not only to better life conditions, but on earning cash through the opportunities brought about by the project.

The proponent and partner groups as well as the households are also inspired to cooperate and prioritize the project. Hence, the whole community and the LGUs are all empowered in taking in the project and in believing in the integrity it brings to them as people.

"You are not only bringing water to this village – which is an essential improvement in our living conditions; you are restoring our pride by showing that people from far away care about their condition – even though our government doesn't," expressed Pastor Nonobert Malit, the Project coordinator and a respected tribal leader in Sitio Amguo.

On the other hand, the main challenge has already begun and a major part of it has been overcome. Particularly, the communities have been able to building a broader sense of community ownership through their sincere participation -- from the project conceptualization through the evaluation. The community played a key role in building the plant and the agricultural processing facilities, investing considerable amount of materials, time and effort.

This project will be replicated and will serve as a model in developing other potential community-based micro-hydro power projects, and help in strengthening the Mindanao Renewable Energy Network as a coalition of renewable energy partners in terms of policy and advocacy and of enhancing sustainability – in attaining a wider impact on sustainable power supply generation all throughout the humble villages of Mindanao.

Yamog Renewable Energy Development Group, Inc. has implemented about ten (10) community based micro hydropower systems with majority of these are engaged in productive end uses aside from household electrification. It has also implemented a photo voltaic battery charging systems in Mindanao in partnership with the PO’s and NGO’s and private groups in the off grid areas of Mindanao.